

Message Text

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SUBJECT: SECURITY SITUATION

REF: BEIRUT 8687

1. SUMMARY. BEIRUT REMAINS RELATIVELY QUIET, HOWEVER INCIDENTS SUCH AS BOMBINGS AND SNIPER ACTIVITY HAVE INCREASED DURING HOURS OF DARKNESS. BEIRUTIS ARE EXHIBITING A GENERAL ATTITUDE OF CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM. ASF HAS BEGUN TO RESHUFFLE FORCES WITHIN CITY AND INCREASE VIGILANCE AT CHECKPOINTS. DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS, MOVEMENT IN THE CITY IS RELATIVELY SECURE AND HEAVY; THERE IS VERY LITTLE MOVEMENT, HOWEVER, BETWEEN THE EAST AND WEST SECTORS OF THE CITY AND MINIMAL TRAFFIC AT NIGHT. SECURITY AT BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT IS GREATLY IMPROVED AND MORE FOREIGN AIRLINES ARE SERVING THE CITY. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO INFORMATION INDICATING AMERICAN PERSONNEL ARE SPECIFICALLY TARGETED, SECURITY MEASURES REMAIN IN FORCE. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH THE FIGHTING HAS STOPPED AND THE SYRIAN-DOMINATED ARAB SECURITY FORCES (ASF) HAVE MAINTAINED THE CEASE-FIRE, THE CITY REMAINS TENSE, WITH BEIRUTIS EXHIBITING GREAT RELIEF AT CALM AND CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM RE THE FUTURE. THE FORTHCOMING DISARMAMENT OF THE GANGS AND MILITIAS, INCLUDING THE PALESTINAINS, REMAINS AN EXPLOSIVE ISSUE AND THE SITUATION IN THE
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SOUTH OF LEBANON COULD THREATEN CURRENT CALM. RSO'S

SECURITY SOURCES DO NOT FORESEE A RESUMPTION OF THE FIGHTING; HOWEVER, THEY ARE PESSIMISTIC AND PREDICT BELFAST-TYPE INCIDENTS, BOMBINGS, SNIPER ATTACKS, ETC., WILL CONTINUE AND INCREASE UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT CAN INSTITUTE STRONG COUNTERMEASURES, SPECIFICALLY, RECONSTITUTE THE LEBANESE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE (ISF) AND DISARM THE MILITIAS.

3. THE ASF HAS BEGUN TO SHIFT THEIR FORCES STATIONED IN THE CITY FOR BETTER REACTION CAPABILITY. HEAVIEST CONCENTRATIONS OF SYRIA'S CRACK THIRD DIVISION ARE IN THE AREA SURROUNDING THE PALESTINIAN CAMPS AT SABRA/CHATILA. SYRIAN-MAINTAINED ROADBLOCKS HAVE GREATLY INCREASED IN THOROUGHNESS, ALTHOUGH NON-SYRIAN ASF CHECKPOINTS HAVE BEEN OBSERVED TO BE MORE LACKADAISICAL AND OF QUESTIONABLE EFFECTIVENESS.

4. MOVEMENT IN THE CITY DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS IS RELATIVELY SECURE AND AS A RESULT TRAFFIC, MOBILE AND PEDESTRIAN, APPROACHES PRE-WAR LEVELS. MOVEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO SECTIONS OF THE CITY REMAINS VERY LIGHT AND IS CONFINED TO THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE BEEN CROSSING DURING THE WAR ALBEIT MORE FREQUENTLY. MANY OF THE WELL-KNOWN RESTAURANTS AND BARS HAVE REOPENED FOR DAYLIGHT OPERATION ONLY. MOVEMENT AFTER DARK IS MINIMAL DUE TO SELF-IMPOSED RESTRAINTS BY THE POPULATION.

5. SECURITY AT BEIRUT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT HAS IMPROVED IMMENSELY SINCE RSO'S FIRST VISIT REPORTED REFTEL. IN THE PERIOD 8-12 DEC THE RSO TRAVELED TO THE AIRPORT DAILY TO MEET OR SEND OFF TRAVELERS. ASF FORCES HAVE INSTITUTED FOUR (4) CHECKPOINTS BETWEEN THE AIRPORT CIRCLE (MORGAN CIRCLE) AND THE TERMINAL ITSELF. ONLY THOSE INDIVIDUALS HOLDING VALID TICKETS, AIRPORT ID OR DIPLOMATIC ID CARDS ARE PERMITTED INSIDE THE TERMINAL BUILDING. THIS REGULATION IS STRICTLY ENFORCED. SECURITY PRESENCE INSIDE THE TERMINAL IS STRONG AND ACTIVE. ONLY EMPLOYEES OR VISITORS WITH A SECURITY ESCORT ARE PERMITTED ON THE FLIGHT LINE. CURRENTLY, PRIMARILY , WE UNDERSTAND, BECAUSE OF LIMITED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RUNWAY LIGHTING AND THE PUBLIC'S RELUCTANCE TO TRAVEL AT NIGHT, LANDINGS AT NIGHT ARE LIMITED TO CARGO CARRIERS. FOLLOWING FLAG CARRIERS ARE SERVING ON A REGULARLY-SCHEDULED BASIS: AIR FRANCE, CYPRUS AIRWAYS, KLM, INTERFLUG, ALITALIA; LUFTHANSA HAS ANNOUNCED PLANS TO RESUME SERVICE TO BEIRUT SHORTLY AND BEA IS A POSSIBILITY IN JANUARY. BOTH NATIONAL FLAG CARRIERS, MEA AND TMA, CONTINUE TO EXPAND THEIR SERVICES.

6. CITY WATER AND ELECTRICITY, AT LEAST IN THE AREA OF THE CHANCERY, CONTINUES TO IMPROVE WITH ONLY SHORT INTERRUPTIONS OF SERVICE. WORK HAS COMMENCED ON THE CITY'S STREET LIGHTING WHICH SHOULD CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED SECURITY AFTER DARK.

7. IN SPITE OF ALL THESE IMPROVEMENTS, THE SITUATION REMAINS TENSE AND COULD DETERIORATE RAPIDLY. HOWEVER, WITH SIZE AND DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIAN FORCES, IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE SITUATION COULD REVERT TO THE "CIVIL WAR SITUATION" WHICH LEBANON HAS JUST EMERGED FROM. WE MUST ASSUME THAT AMERICAN PERSONNEL REMAIN AND WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN TARGETS OF OPPORTUNITY AND OF DESIGN FOR THOSE INDIVIDUALS AND GROUPS WHO WISH TO DISRUPT THE CEASE-FIRE, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE NO CONCRETE EVIDENCE SUCH IS THE CASE. THE RSO UNDERSTANDS THAT REJECTIONIST PALESTINIAN GROUPS ARE PREPARED TO RESUME WIDESPREAD TERRORIST ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CITY SHOULD THE ASF ATTEMPT TO FORCIBLY ENTER THE CAMPS. THERE HAVE BEEN TWO RECENT ATTEMPTS ON THE LIFE OF RAYMOND EDDE AND MOST RECENTLY A SHOOT-OUT INVOLVING FORMER PRESIDENT CHAMOUN. THE ABILITY OF THE ASF TO COUNTERACT TERRORIST ACTIVITY OF THE BELFAST TYPE IS LIMITED. THIS IS NOT INTENDED AS A CRITICISM OF THE ASF'S SECURITY DISPOSITIONS, BUT RATHER A STATEMENT OF FACT THAT MILITARY FORCES CANNOT ELIMINATE CERTAIN TYPES OF TERRORIST ACTIVITY. AS A RESULT, THE POST'S SECURITY PROGRAMS CONTINUE TO BE VIGOROUSLY ENFORCED. PERSONNEL MOVEMENTS ARE LIMITED TO TRAVEL DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS AND EXCEPTIONS ARE TREATED ON A CASE-BY-CASE BASIS ACCORDING TO PURPOSE, DESTINATION AND DURATION OF TIME OUTSIDE THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CHANCERY. ALL MOVEMENTS MUST RECEIVE THE RSO'S APPROVAL, AND EMPLOYEES ARE ACCOMPANIED BY SECURITY PERSONNEL. THE POST, WITH THE RSO'S CONCURRENCE, HAS ENCOURAGED STAFFERS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CEASE-FIRE TO GET OUT OF THE CHANCERY FOR OCCASIONAL EXCURSIONS TO HAMRA, ETC. THESE UNOFFICIAL TRIPS WILL CONTINUE AS LONG AS THE SITUATION PERMITS. IN GENERAL "SO FAR, SO GOOD."
HOUGHTON

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